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ABSTRACT

Most materials on value clarification techniques have been written by professionals working at university schools of education. To examine value clarification from another view, to see what difficulties teachers are having in translating new techniques into classroom realities, an eighth grade social studies teacher relates his classroom experiences while developing techniques discussed by Louis Raths and his co-authors in "Values and Teaching". Raths approaches value clarification with a seven-part valuing process which encourages children to prize one's beliefs and behaviors, to choose one's beliefs and behaviors, and to act on one's beliefs. Methods for implementing these steps emphasize the clarifying response and value sheets. The teacher's experiences with both of these techniques reflect several problems and pitfalls of their use in the classroom situation. A basic problem confronted in using the techniques is the extent of neutrality or direction on the part of the teacher. Student-teacher relations as affected by the techniques are considered. Systematic measure of the effects in the classroom are closely considered and means for accomplishing meaningful recordkeeping are suggested and developed. (Author/KSM)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF VALUE CLARIFICATION SKILLS: INITIAL EFFORTS IN AN EIGHTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS

by
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PREFACE

One of, if not the single most misunderstood thing about the value clarification approach--i.e. working with values in the classroom--is the distinction between the teaching of values (i.e. the "content" of people's values) and the process of valuing.

The value clarification approach is concerned with helping individuals utilize the seven processes of valuing, which according to Louis E. Raths are:

PRIZING one's beliefs and behaviors
1. prizing and cherishing
2. publicly affirming when appropriate

CHOOSING one's beliefs and behaviors
3. choosing from alternatives
4. choosing after consideration of consequences
5. choosing freely

ACTING on one's beliefs
6. acting
7. acting with a pattern, consistency and repetition.

The object, therefore, is not to instill a particular set of values. There is a very important, indeed a fundamental distinction that needs to be made between teaching the process of valuing and teaching the content of people's values!

This manuscript relates the experiences--the "initial efforts"-- of a teacher who attempted to apply the value clarification approach with his eighth grade social studies class. I admire--and hope the reader will too--the openness of the author's discussion of his successes and failures, his uses and frankly acknowledged abuses of the value clarification approach.

One of the very "sticky questions" in dealing with the teaching of value clarification skills (the valuing process as distinct from teaching specific values) is the question of the "neutrality" or "non-neutrality" of the teacher. Barry Kingman recognizes this, analyzes the alternatives (as he sees them), and explains why he has opted for a directive approach--one characterized by honesty and openness.

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The Development of Value Clarification Skills: Initial Efforts in an Eighth Grade Social Studies Class

Barry Kingman
February 17, 1974

Extensive materials have already been written on value clarification techniques. Most of these materials, however, have been written by professionals working at university schools of education. It might be helpful to approach value clarification from the other end and see what difficulties teachers are having in translating new techniques into classroom realities.* In the following pages I will discuss my classroom experiences while trying to develop the techniques discussed by Louis Raths and his co-authors in Values and Teaching.

Raths defines values as decisions about the quality of our lives and our relation to society. He points out that what is often identified as an emotional problem is more likely a value problem. Symptoms of value disorder include apathy, indecision, inconsistency, over-conformity or over-dissent and role playing.[1] Raths would approach these problems with a seven-part valuing

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* I am a part-time teacher at Harbor Country Day School on Long Island and a full-time graduate student in history at SUNY, Stony Brook. Although my situation is somewhat unique, like most teachers I face two general problems in trying to develop new teaching techniques: I have not done pedagogical research on a doctoral level and I have a busy schedule.

process:

1. Encourage children to make choices, and to make them freely.
2. Help them discover and examine available alternatives when faced with choices.
3. Help children weigh alternatives thoughtfully, reflecting on the consequences of each.
4. Encourage children to consider what it is that they prize and cherish.
5. Give them opportunities to make public affirmations of their choices.
6. Encourage them to act, behave, live in accordance with their choices.
7. Help them to examine repeated behaviors or patterns in their life. 2

Raths explains various methods for implementing these steps with particular emphasis on the clarifying response and value sheets. Clarifying responses are for brief exchanges between teacher and student. They are not insistent, nor extensive. Their goal is merely to get the student thinking in terms of the seven parts of the value clarification process. Raths cites an example of a student telling the teacher that he is going to Washington for the weekend. Instead of saying, "That's nice," the teacher asks if he is glad that he is going. The student thinks and replies that actually he would rather stay home and play baseball.[3]

I first tried clarifying responses on a field trip. We were on a special museum beach and had been told not to climb on the hill behind the beach because that would cause erosion. One of my students noticed that students from another school were breaking this rule and asked me to stop them. I asked her who

she thought should be responsible for enforcing the rules and did nothing. The situation was somewhat different from the Washington trip example cited by Raths because my inaction clearly said that I did not think it was my responsibility to be disciplining children from other schools, at least not on this problem. My inaction also might have implied for her that I thought she should act on her displeasure rather than asking me to. I hoped, however, that my relation with her and with other students was such that she would act according to her own ideas. She did not immediately answer my question, but seemed to be thinking. Later that morning, when she saw some other children running on the hill behind the beach, she told them to stop it. They said that they were local children and not even on a field trip. She replied that she did not care. They still should not break the rules.

These last actions indicate a key problem in value clarification. Had the student really thought about the problem of rules and who should enforce them or was she merely acting on what she thought was a mandate from me for peer enforcement? Teachers working on value clarification do so in an atmosphere pervaded with personal and institutional influences. In this atmosphere Raths wants the student to make choices and take responsibility rather than merely interpreting the teacher's desires. Yet all his techniques could unwittingly be implemented within the traditional context of maximum control. He is aware of the problem, but merely says that the teacher must encourage the student to

think and make decisions for himself. Given the directive nature of the socialization process, more than simple encouragement is needed. (A possible approach to the problem is presented in the last pages of this paper.)

Once when I answered a student comment with a clarifying response, she replied with frustration that I was always asking questions. I suspect that she wanted to establish a non-professional, personal contact with me and regarded my questioning as an obstacle. The problem has not come up again perhaps because as I became more at ease with value clarifying responses, I could focus greater attention on the student and less attention on how to implement the technique. In fact, after initially distracted attempts which might have prevented personal contact, I found that clarifying responses increased such contact. One day at recess I asked a student on the basketball team if basketball was his favorite sport and continued with other questions based on Raths' model. The student was clearly pleased that I had taken an interest and went on to discuss his sporting activities. The exchange lasted only a few minutes, but afterwards I felt I knew the student a little better.

Although clarifying responses have been the basis for very personal discussions, these discussions do tend to be one-sided. It is hardly fair to expect your students to open up to you, while you remain aloof. To avoid this problem I occasionally allow the students to reverse the questioning process and tell them about my life and my values.

Although I have tried to vary my use of clarifying responses to cover all of Raths' aspects of the value clarifying process, I suspect I have settled into two or three types of responses. After the first week of working on the technique I realized that a majority of my responses were beginning with, "Are you saying..." I also suspect that I have used clarifying responses with only a minority of my students. To find out how limited my use of the technique has become, next semester I plan to set up a measurement system where for two weeks I will try to record as many clarifying responses as possible, listing which of Raths' seven clarifying ingredients was encouraged and the name of the student involved. As closely as possible, I will also try to record the wording of the exchanges once or twice a day.

Some of the students have begun imitating me and are asking their own clarifying questions. Next semester I would like to encourage this more actively by explaining Raths' model to them. It might also be helpful to initiate exercises where one student explains his views on some issue and the rest of the class questions him according to Raths' model.

The clarifying response has proved useful in ways not mentioned by Raths. Once, while unsuccessfully trying to talk to a student about her behavior in class, I unconsciously fell into value clarification. I had been doing most of the talking before this occurred. The clarifying responses, however, forced me to say less and listen more. The student left pondering the problem rather than feeling the resentment that had been clearly

present at the beginning of the session.

I have also found clarifying responses helpful in seminars. Often discussion is not fruitful simply because people are not stating their thoughts concisely or because they are not saying what they really mean. During a seminar last fall, when the professor made some disparaging remarks about the use of film as a medium for serious scholarship, I asked him if he meant that only those who wrote could be considered serious historians. When forced to make a clear choice concerning new types of history, he retreated and admitted that film might have possibilities.

Once I caught myself using the clarifying response in a distastefully destructive manner. Feeling frustrated and angry after a difficult week, I used the technique to try to throw the target of my frustration into confusion while remaining aloof. One could imagine a harried teacher on a difficult day falling into the same trap.

Value sheets are the second technique that Raths emphasizes. The sheets include a striking statement to draw the students' attention to a value problem, and various questions to lead them to Raths' clarifying process. He claims it is best to have the students work on these sheets at home. The heated and threatening discussions that often result from value discussions in class are less conducive to clear thinking.[4]

During the field trip mentioned earlier, I noticed an incident that seemed suitable for a value sheet. That morning,

when the bus arrived, the students got on making lots of noise. The bus driver started to address them but they kept on talking. They seemed to assume that if anyone spoke, it would be a teacher. The bus driver got angry and made an irate speech telling them if the disorder continued the bus would not leave. The students resented this, it seemed to me, in a way that they would not have resented a teacher. I was not sure to what degree class snobbery was involved. (My students are mostly upper middle class.) The next day I assigned the following value sheet for homework:

I don't bother to talk to people with low-paying jobs. They are simply dull. If they were clever, they would be more successful. They would make more money. These people are the failures, the losers in life.

1. Do you agree with this statement? If so, elaborate. If not, what do you think about people who do not have lots of money?
2. Why do some people have more money than others?
3. Would you be embarrassed to tell what you think about working class people to a friend whose father worked in a factory?
4. How did you treat the bus driver on Friday's field trip? Were your actions consistent with your answer to #1?

Most of the students wrote that they felt the same way about poor people as anyone else, but then failed to carry through consistently on the second question. They wrote that some people have more money because they worked hard and got an education. If I use this value sheet again, I will insert a question asking those who gave this response to indicate if hard work is worthy of respect. If so, does this mean that the

poor are worthy of less respect?

Since most students stressed the importance of education for making money, I wanted to serve as a data source and point out the conclusions of well documented research on American education. For most poor children, the educational system serves more as a barrier than as a means for mobility. Even if they work hard and are smart, it is much more difficult for them to get a good education than it is for middle class or rich children. When I mentioned these realities in the next class, the students were not responsive. I suspect I alienated them because what began as an attempt to make the facts known ended up as a much more subjective criticism of American education as a whole. Behind a facade of data I was actually moralizing.

Another value sheet dealt with the problem of distributing valuable resources in a social context:

> Mr. Goelzer is a teacher at Mudville High School. His schedule allows only five hours a week for helping individual students. Just before the exam period most of his students wanted individual help. Because time was short, Mr. Goelzer decided he would help only those students who had done well in the past.

1. What alternatives were available to Mr. Goelzer in this situation?
2. What were the consequences of his decision?
3. Is the situation above at all relevant to your life?
4. Does the situation help us with the problem posed by Buddha's maxim about occupations that injure others?

In spite of Raths' warnings I tried to do this one in class. What went on indicates that his warnings are at least partly

correct. The atmosphere during the discussion was friendly, but there was inevitably a certain amount of face-saving going on that limited honest exchange. I am reluctant, however, to give up group discussion. If a student writing at home can do so at leisure and without feeling threatened, he also loses the instant feedback from an outside force that is so helpful in ironing out ideas.

The goal of this value sheet was to make the students feel the contradiction between a demand for equity in the distribution of educational resources within the community of their class and an acceptance of inequity in the distribution of both educational and economic resources in the society at large. Before beginning the value sheet we discussed what bias meant. I warned them that the value sheet reflected my beliefs and that they should try to identify them and then decide whether or not they should be rejected.

The first two questions sparked a lively discussion that revealed a problem in my hypothetical situation: for the students it was not authentic. Their own experiences told them that when a student needs help, teachers usually find time to provide it. The class ended up discussing how the teacher might find more time rather than how to distribute a needed resource available only in limited quantities. If a situation for this sort of value sheet arises again I will use the problem of who should be allowed to do how much talking during a class period when the

issue under discussion is so controversial that almost everyone wants to talk.

In retrospect I feel a bit sheepish about how I handled the last part of the class. The students wanted to continue to discuss how teachers might make more time available for helping students. I think this sort of discussion is healthy because it can lead students to an active role in the school community in which they spend most of their time. Instead of encouraging this discussion and using value clarifying responses to establish the students' ideas on the nature of student and teacher responsibilities, I made them continue with the value sheet. I pointed out that they were receiving a larger share of the educational resources than poor children and that when they got a job, their high salaries would mean less money for the wages of the poor. Student participation in the discussion was mediocre. Perhaps many of the students were still thinking about teachers giving help to students before an exam. Perhaps the connection between the situation in the value sheet and problems of wealth distribution was too obscure.

Those students who made the connection identified my beliefs on this issue and rejected them as unrealistic. This would indicate at least partial success in attaining a major objective. I have told the students that it would be wrong if I did not speak up for what I believed in. I have also stressed that the students should work out their own values and not just

accept what the teacher says. I have been concerned that the authority of my position would prevent the students from doing this. This class would indicate that the students are not afraid to take an independent stand.

The impact of these two value sheets is difficult to measure. In both cases the students failed to seriously consider contradictions in their values, but they did develop an awareness that attitudes about the poor and about education and mobility are important issues. They also developed an awareness that some people would object to the large portion of the available educational resources they receive. Perhaps a groundwork has been laid that will help the students work out their contradictions at some future time.

In future work with value sheets I especially want to avoid the trap of the liberal or radical teacher debating his conservative students. This alienates the students, I suspect, because it is like a professional full-back using his greater size and know-how to dominate a high school football game. I should also pay attention to how much talking I do. If I want to avoid forcing my views on the students, then I should not allow myself any more time to explain them than I would allow a student to explain his.

There is, however, a distinction between stating beliefs and questioning the students to clarify theirs. It is occasionally helpful to control a discussion with close questioning in order

to set an example of how to clarify a value statement. Other times it is helpful for the teacher to completely withdraw and give the students a chance to do this on their own, or to have a mixed discussion with periods of teacher direction and periods of teacher withdrawal.

A strong segment of current educational thought would criticize my value sheets for being too directive. The authors of a widely used textbook on teaching social studies, Hunt and Metcalf, call for teacher neutrality.[5] Attempts at neutrality, however, can do little more than create facades of impartiality while basic biases remain. Hunt and Metcalf end their book with a series of chapters on problems in American life. But why select problems? Why not the victories of the American army? One could conceivably try to present a mixture of the good and the problematic in American life, but how much of each? No matter what balance was decided upon, someone with a different perspective could argue that the balance was distorted. Teachers are faced with an inescapable reality that before material can be presented to a class it must be organized. The manner in which it is organized is always subjective, reflecting the teacher's beliefs. Further, there is so much material that might be presented in any course that the teacher is forced to exclude most of it. The manner in which he decides on this problem is again based on his beliefs.

Unlike Hunt and Metcalf, Raths does not call for teacher

neutrality. In discussing the value sheet technique, however, he says that the teacher's bias must not be visible.[6] If one accepts that bias cannot be eliminated, then Raths' visibility criterion means that the bias must be hidden. This leads to the distinction between direction and manipulation. I would consider the former open and the latter secretive. Raths' demand, therefore, becomes a demand for manipulation.

Even if it were possible to be neutral or create an appearance of neutrality, such efforts would be lost in the direction and manipulation implicit in the organization of American schools. Teachers, in fact, are not allowed to be neutral. They are important agents in a socialization process with a very definite series of messages. Any teacher who encouraged his students to come to school only when they felt like it or who insisted on giving everyone in the class the same grade would soon be without a job.

Since institutional and individual direction is inevitable and to a degree even desirable (no one denies that we have a responsibility to protect children from physical danger), the best approach, it seems to me, is one of honesty and openness. The teacher's responsibility here is an active one. He must make a systematic effort to help his students identify and understand the mechanisms and messages of his own direction and those of the larger socialization process. Having done this, the teacher should

encourage his students to examine their socialization critically and challenge what they do not like. He should be careful to point out the realities of adult power and the punishments that can result from resistance. The decision of whether or not to resist, however, should be left to the student.

With my own students this has meant a series of discussions on the nature of respect, the implications of stability and change, the power structure at our school, the purpose and value of what we do in class, and the tension that often arises between what is right and what the rules require. The results of these discussions have been encouraging. After receiving a low grade on a paper because she had not used any periods or capital letters, one student came up to me and said that she thought that writing in sentence form was distracting. I pointed out that writing sentences would help the reader understand what she was saying. She disagreed and a long discussion followed which failed to establish any agreement; so I told her that the choice was hers, but she should know that as a rule teachers do not reward students who write run-on sentences. Another incident involved a rather dull textbook we were using. I had decided to use it because I felt that some of the data in the book was important for basic needs like understanding the evening news broadcast. The students complained about the book and convinced me that it was doing more harm than good. It was dropped.

At times I have been concerned about the implications of

my activities for other teachers and the principal of my school. One student has presented a list of demands to the principal. Others, I suspect, have become what some teachers might call trouble-makers. However, considering the fluid nature of contemporary society (see Alvin Toffler's Future Shock), there can be little doubt about the value of such students. Since the answers of today might well be inappropriate for the problems of tomorrow, it is important that children develop questioning and innovative attitudes.

I have found the manner in which I direct my students helpful because it allows me to speak up for and act upon my values, while maintaining a degree of student autonomy. In terms of power, of course, the students are at a disadvantage, but this is a problem that adults also encounter as individual citizens facing powerful institutions.

Much remains to be done. For a more systematic measurement of how I have affected my students, I am working on a series of diagnostic questionnaires based on Bloom's taxonomy for the affective domain.[7] As a supplement to these questionnaires, in class I try to make a note of illustrative incidents and record them in a file I am keeping on a sampling of students. During the past few weeks I have been tape recording my classes in order to measure what sort of interaction is occurring. I am continuing experimentation with the variety of value clarifying techniques that Raths has developed. Finally I am trying to

develop new techniques that will encourage students to understand and critically assess the socialization process which is such an important part of their lives.

Footnotes

[1]Raths, Louis E. and Merrill Harmin and Sidney B. Simon, Values and Teaching: Working with Values in the Classroom, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1966, pp. 3-7.

[2]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[3]Ibid., p. 51.

[4]Ibid., pp. 83-84, 106.

[5]Hunt, Maurice and Lawrence Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies, New York: Harper and Row, 1955.

[6]Raths, Values and Teaching, pp. 77, 109.

[7]Bloom, Benjamin and David Krathwohl and Bertram Masia Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook II: Affective Domain, New York: David McKay Company, 1956.